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ABSTRACT

Sixty-five competitive employers (44 males and 21 females) were interviewed regarding their perceptions of specific career/vocational skills needed by handicapped people for successful employment. All employers had experience with handicapped workers and held supervisory and managerial positions at their employment site. Employers were distributed among four types of job sites: food service, custodial/maintenance, stock/construction, and miscellaneous. Ss ranked 22 job skills in terms of priorities. Job skills identified as highest priority by the majority included dependability (78%), punctuality (74%), pride in work (72%), respect for authority (54%) and getting along with others. Implications for vocational curricula include the need to refocus social skills and to provide opportunities to learn job-related skills in actual competitive employment sites. (CL)

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CAREER EDUCATION FROM THE EMPLOYERS' VIEWPOINT

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Career Education from the Employers' Viewpoint

An assumption of schooling is that students who participate in the formal educational process will benefit through preparation for post school adjustment and independence. For the student with learning and behavior problems, special education provides individual services to enhance their movement toward this end. Yet, a decade of a free and appropriate education has not resulted in optimal vocational adjustment for handicapped youth. The handicapped continue to experience high unemployment rates, between 50 and 75 percent (Will, 1984). For the 300,000 handicapped students who graduate from special education each year, the situation is not likely to improve unless a concerted effort is made to develop career programs that interface the goals of the school with roles in the community. These unique efforts require the school to initiate and build significant relationships with local employers and competitive employment sites.

Career/vocational programs must develop and expand innovative projects to provide students the tools needed to obtain personal fulfillment and economic independence (Kokaska, 1983). According to Brody-Hasazi, Salembier & Finck (1983), little research offers practical guidance to special educators who wish to implement school programs which lead to employment. Furthermore, a discrepancy may exist between what special education teachers perceive as career preparation skills and those skills which employers seek among youth they hire (Burton & Bero, 1984). To develop realistic career education programs, one way to begin would be to survey representatives (prospective employers) in the local community.

Procedure

In the Spring of 1984, trained graduate students interviewed local employers to obtain their perception of specific career/vocational skills learning handicapped individuals need for successful employment. The survey instrument used for the interviews was composed of 22 job skills selected from the Burton & Bero (1984) study in which employers and teachers were interviewed on their perceptions of career education. During the interviews, employers were asked to rate 22 job skills on a Likert-type scale ranging from "1" (most important) to "7" (least important).

The sample was comprised of 65 competitive employers, 44 males and 21 females, working in a large county in southern California. All employers had experience with handicapped workers and held supervisory and managerial positions in their employment site. The employers were distributed among four types of job sites: 1) Food Service (29.2%); 2) Custodial/Maintenance (23.1%); 3) Stock/Construction (24.6%); and 4) Miscellaneous (23.1%). Employment sites represented in the Food Service category included fast food and full service restaurants; coffee shops and cafeterias. The custodial/maintenance positions typically involved janitorial services in office, school and hospital settings. Jobs in warehouses, mail rooms, food markets and general contracting agencies were incorporated in the Stock/Construction category. The Miscellaneous category included those sites which hire employees in a variety of job types such as, retail department stores, the local Air Force Base and municipal employment.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Percentages of employers responding to the 22 job skills by indicating a "1" (most important) were ranked from high to low. As shown on Table 1, job skills identified as highest priority by the majority (over 50%) of the employers included dependability (78.1%), being on time (73.8%), pride in work (72.3%), respect for authority (53.8%), and getting along with others (52.3%). These skills are reflective of personal and social abilities needed for employment adjustment. Similarly, Foss & Bostwick (1981) found that social-emotional problems of the handicapped are frequently a major obstacle in maintaining a job. These findings are consistent with Cheney & Foss (1984) who reported that mentally retarded employees had difficulty accepting criticism or correction from their supervisor; as was demonstrated by arguing, disagreeing, sarcasm, making excuses, anger or ignoring the supervisor.

The sample in our study also prioritized dependability and punctuality as other important job skills. This finding is supported by Vautour, Stocks & Kolek (1983) who found that employers expressed concern over their handicapped employees' irresponsibility, as demonstrated by tardiness and absenteeism. The employers' message was for educators to teach handicapped students responsible work behaviors in school and for employers to teach specific job tasks at work.

Our findings as well as the findings of other authors have important implications to vocational curricula for handicapped students. First, special education must refocus career/vocational curricula on

TABLE 1

Rankings of Employers on Job Skills

Priority No.	Job Skill	%
1	Dependability	78.1
2	Be on Time	73.8
3	Pride in Work	72.3
4	Respect for Authority	53.8
5	How to get along with others	52.3
6	Enthusiasm	40.0
7	Use of Transportation	38.5
8	Reading and Math Skills	35.4
9	Good grooming	33.8
10	On job training	33.3
11	How to find job	30.8
12	Communication with public	30.8
13	Leave personal problems at home	27.7
14	Physical stamina	26.2
15	Fill out job application	26.2
16	Job related skills	25.4
17	Independent living skills	22.6
18	Knowing about jobs/vocations	18.8
19	Working under pressure	18.5
20	Physical Coordination	18.5
21	Able to move quickly	15.4
22	Flexibility	13.8

teaching learning handicapped students to master social skills necessary to maintain employment. Second, teachers must take the leadership to develop cooperative relationships with local employers, and third, opportunities to learn job-related skills in an actual competitive employment site must be provided for the handicapped during the school years. As suggested by Brolin (1983), the time has come to refocus the curriculum so that all students are given opportunities for career development which result in adult success and happiness.

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